District Review Report

School District No. 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin)

February 22 - 25, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Gary Doi, Superintendent, School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Cariboo - Chilcotin
District Number:	27
Superintendent:	Wayne Leckie
Date of Visit:	February 22 – 25, 2004
Team Chair:	Gary Doi, Superintendent, SD 27 (Okanagan Skaha)
Team Members:	Kathy Bedard, District Principal, SD 8 (Kootenay Lake) Glenda Bilinsky, Parent, SD 63 (Saanich) Bev Craig, Teacher, SD 46 (Sunshine Coast) Linda Kaser, Superintendent, School & District Improvement, Ministry of Education Cathy McCubbin, Teacher, SD 52 (Prince Rupert) Wes Neumeier, Superintendent, SD 78 (Fraser Cascade) Donna Preston, Curriculum Instruction Administrator, SD 57 (Prince George) Trish Rosborough, Provincial Coordinator, Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, Ministry of Education Gail Sumanik, Consultant, BCPVPA

Context

School District 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) is a diverse and geographically challenged district.

The district encompasses an area of 59,000 square kilometers which is larger than the Province of Nova Scotia. It serves 6,500 students in 30 schools in 15 communities. Williams Lake and 100 Mile House are the key regional centres for the outlying elementary/junior secondary schools and smaller communities. Sixty-two percent of the students (4013) in the district are bused. A dormitory is also available in Williams Lake for senior secondary students who cannot commute by bus on a daily basis. The dispersed nature of the district and the harsh weather conditions during the winter months make it challenging to serve all schools efficiently.

The connectivity for electronic communications varies significantly in the district. High speed/broad-band width (T1 lines) exist for the schools in the two communities of Williams Lake and 100 Mile House. Schools in other communities, however, have very limited connectivity.

The student enrolment in the district continues to decline each year. In the past 6 years, the school age student enrolment has decreased by 1,361 FTE - a reduction of 17.2%. The First Nations student population, however, continues to increase somewhat each year. As of September 2003, First Nations students represent approximately 20% of the total student enrolment.

In the past two years, six schools (70 Mile House Elementary, McLeese Lake Elementary, Riske Creek Elementary, Crescent Heights Elementary, Chimney Creek Elementary, Anne Stevenson Secondary) have closed. Four more schools are up for review for closure this year. In addition, the school district has recently declared a significant shortfall of 4.5 million dollars for the upcoming school year. This issue will be considered in the district's budget development consultation process.

The Board and Superintendent have, in the past two years, sought considerable input into various operational and educational issues. Core reviews were initiated and various committees were established to assist in setting future direction.

The District Review Team observed many positive educational programs, structures and initiatives that are present in the schools and district. This report will highlight some examples.

In the Team's view, the critical next step for the district is to develop next year's budget considerations in a manner that is mindful and supportive of the student achievement agenda. At the same time, there is the need to revise and revitalize the student achievement plan in the district.

The Team is hopeful that the recommendations in this report will assist the district and schools in developing and sustaining a broad-based plan for improving student achievement.

Summary of Process

The purposes of the District Review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in plans to improve student achievement; and
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the Minister about improving student achievement.

On the first morning of the Review, the Superintendent, Director of Instruction (First Nations) and District Principal (literacy, numeracy, safety) presented an overview of the district's background context and accountability contract. Also in attendance were: the Board Chair, a school trustee from Williams Lake, Secretary-Treasurer, maintenance supervisor and the CCAA President and DPAC President.

Members of the District Review Team met with 20 of the 30 schools for approximately 2 hours each. The focus of the meeting was to discuss the school plan involving the 10 points of inquiry. The schools visited included: 3 secondary schools (Columneetza, Williams Lake, Peter Skene Ogden), 4 rural elementary-junior secondary schools (100 Mile, Alexis Creek, Horsefly, Tatla) and 13 elementary schools (Anahim, Cataline, Chilcotin, Glendale, Kwaleen, Lac La Hache, Marie Sharpe, Mountview, Nesika, 100 Mile, 108 Mile, 150 Mile, Poplar Glade).
At each of the schools, team members met with representatives of the school planning council.

Members of the Team also met with the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) and the District Parents Advisory Council (DPAC).

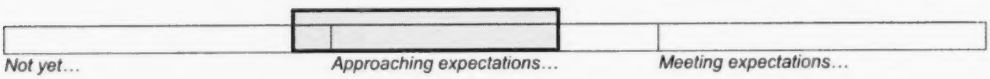
In addition to the District's accountability contract and school plans, the District Review Team considered:

- "School District 27 Profile", 2002-03, Prepared by the Ministry of Education
- "Building Capacity, A Report of SD27 Student Support Services", Don Chapman, May, 2003
- "Review of School Board Functioning & District Administration", Norman Robinson, May, 2003

The Team wishes to thank the school district for its hospitality and the warm welcome it received at each of its school visits. The Team was impressed with the commitment and dedication of the school trustees, district staff, school personnel, parents and students in their efforts to improve student success.

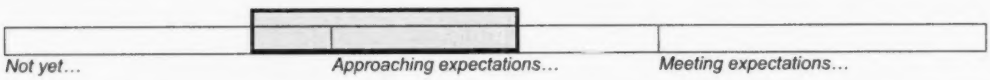
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



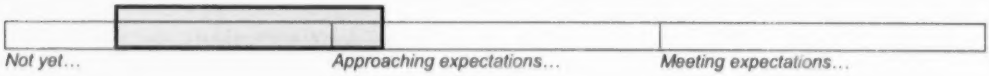
   - Many schools are showing promise in developing clear goals focused on improving student achievement.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



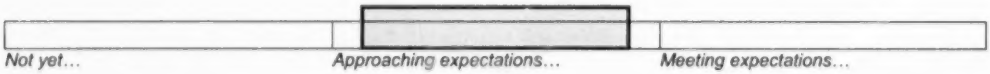
   - The rationale for the district and school goals is based on limited evidence.
   - The selection of some school goals was determined based on compliance rather than by identified school need.
   - Many of the school goals were based on teacher and parent perceptual data rather than by an analysis of classroom, school and district data.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



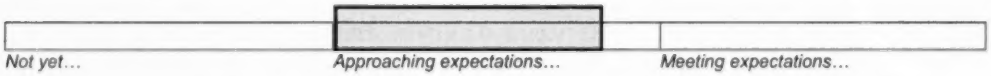
- Many schools recognize the need for a deeper conversation about relevant classroom assessment for student learning.
- School level data aggregated up to the district level is not evident in the district's accountability contract.
- The district and schools rely primarily on provincial data.
- Some schools are beginning to explore the use and value of performance standards and other forms of classroom data.
- There are varied sources of data available throughout the district but there is little evidence of a coordinated process for compiling, analyzing and using the information.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- There is a wide variety of focused strategies (in the areas of literacy and safety) that is evident in the schools and district.
- The strategies to improve student achievement for First Nations students are not clearly understood or shared throughout the schools.
- The district investment in helping teachers learn and apply effective reading strategies has made a positive difference in many schools.

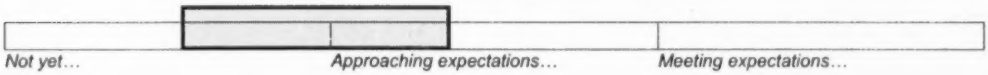
5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The district has supported various initiatives (eg. Reading Recovery, Secondary timetabling & E-Learning) to get improved results with its goals.
- The Shuswap, Chilcotin and Carrier language programs are actively supported by the Board and the First Nations Education Council.

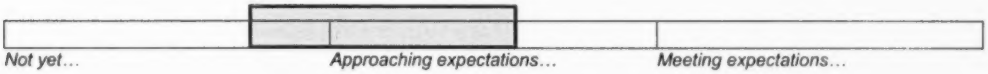
- A District Principal was appointed to coordinate and support the literacy, numeracy and social responsibility goals.
- Some schools have adjusted their bell schedule to reduce behaviorial issues.
- Some schools have developed an uninterrupted literacy instruction block of time.
- Secondary schools have developed independent study classes (IDS) for students who require support.
- The secondary schools in Williams Lake and 100 Mile House have been innovative in coordinating their timetables and sharing resources to maximize the learning and program options for students.
- There has been a collaborative effort in the community to develop drug free zones.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



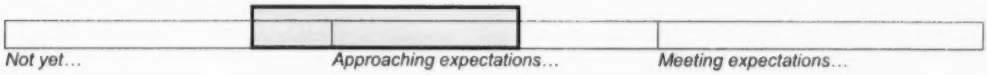
- Well-defined baseline data and targets are not evident at the district level and in most schools.
- There was little evidence of ongoing tracking student achievement using classroom and school data.
- Using FSA data or survey data as the leading indicator at the school level is problematic.
- Most schools are just beginning to look for baselines and trends.
- There is a need to align goals, data, strategies and structures to results.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



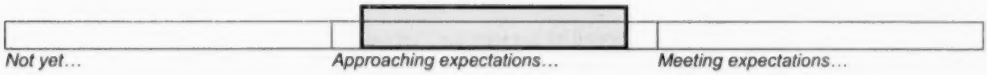
- There is limited dialogue about student achievement among schools and the district.
- Communication with the public about student achievement and progress is at the beginning stages.
- Many SPCs are actively involved in a dialogue about student achievement.
- The representation and communication on SPCs varies from school to school.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.



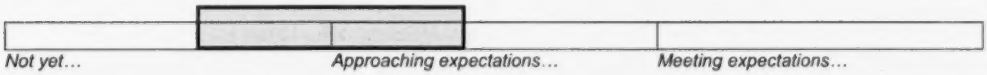
- The interactive strategy between and among schools and district is limited.
- The district plan does not clearly indicate how the district will help inform, guide and support the schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.
- The alignment of district and school goals is at the beginning stage.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Preliminary support and training for SPC's was provided by the district.
- Parents as partners were involved in establishing the district goals many years ago; however, that involvement has not been maintained.
- Parents are actively involved at the school level to assist with and support school programs.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- Some schools have created a positive learning community that values the leadership of all partners.
- The First Nations Education Council and First Nations Director of Instruction use a shared leadership model to provide direction for the district's First Nations programs.
- Despite the commitment and dedication of district staff, the district is struggling to establish a clear, compelling vision on improving the achievement of all students.
- The Superintendent of Schools and the Board are making a concerted effort to 'turn around' the district in order to refocus the energies and resources towards improving the student achievement of all students.

Strengths

The Team acknowledges the following strengths:

- Greater transparency, accountability and collaboration by the Board and District Office;
- District staff provides a variety of professional development opportunities to support student learning;
- Schools of choice are available in urban and rural areas;
- Collaborative efforts of secondary schools to provide more program options for students;
- First Nations Student Role Model program; and
- Community support for school safety programs (eg. P.A.R.T.Y. & WITS).

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus:

- The first 'Year Round School' in Canada was established in Williams Lake;
- Collaborative strategies are used to implement the Shuswap, Chilcotin and Carrier language programs (eg. Teaming elders with support workers; using the natural environment for teaching students);
- Innovative uses of sharing digital video productions with students in other parts of Canada;
- Concerted community involvement in establishing and maintaining Drug Free Zones around schools; and
- Support for beginning principals with an experienced mentor.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results.

- There is a need for a greater emphasis on improving the understanding of 'assessment for learning' and the use of performance standards.

- The commitment to First Nations student success needs to be visible and connected to the life of every school.

- There is a need to review the planning cycle and processes for the Board approval, support and monitoring of the School Plans.

Priorities

Areas requiring immediate attention:

- The school district needs to develop a credible and focused plan on improving student achievement by creating a positive, collaborative learning environment that involves all partner groups at all levels of the organization.

- The school district needs to develop next year's budget considerations in a manner that is mindful and supportive of the student achievement agenda.